

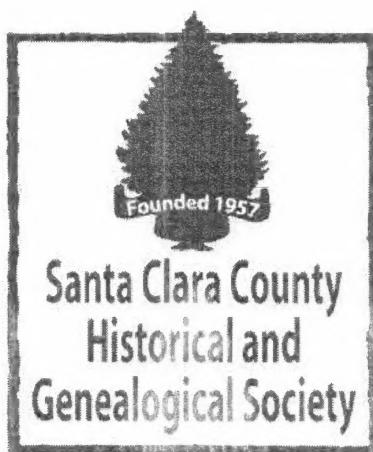
Early Life in Santa Clara Valley

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Notes:

- Original in possession of the Santa Clara County Archives, San Jose, California
- Scanned by the Santa Clara Historical and Genealogical Society



EARLY LIFE IN SANTA CLARA VALLEY

The life of the Spaniards in early California was a romantic one, full of gaiety and pleasure. Although they had many hardships to face they did not let it interfere with their happiness.

Their dwellings were rudely built but were serviceable. They were built of black soil mixed with straw and molded into bricks 18" square and 3" thick. These adobe bricks were dried in the sun and laid in the walls with a mortar made of the same material. The rafters were rough poles made from bark and the roofs were of rushes, called tules, fastened with rawhide thongs.

Their crops consisted of wheat, beans, maize, melons and pumpkins. They cared to raise no more than was necessary for their own subsistence. Plows were constructed from branches of trees, the oak branch serving the purpose of a harrow. The majority of their crops were cut with a sickle.

The principal dish of the Spanish was stewed beef and beans with red peppers (chili colorado) while tortillas served as their bread. These consisted of a flat, water-like cake generally made of flour, but often of cornmeal and were baked on flat irons before the fire. This was a monotonous diet, but wholesome and strength-giving.

A rodeo to which everyone was invited was held yearly. During this festivity all young steers were branded. Great quantities of food were consumed, some of which included chickens, beef, tomatoes, frijoles and enchiladas, hot with peppers. An old custom of the Spanish was to keep their hats on during conversation and at table.

Butchering season, or "matanza", as the Spanish called it,

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followed the rodeo. Only enough cattle were kept for which feed could be produced, and the remainder were slaughtered for their hides and tallow. Hides were dried in the sun and along with tallow were sold to vessels at San Francisco, or to dealers at the pueblo. The average market price for hides was \$1.50 in cash or \$2.00 in trade, while tallow was 3¢ per pound in trade. The best pieces of meat were cut into thin strips or torn into shreds and dried in the sun, making what the Mexicans called "carne seca", which was known to Americans as "jerked beef".

Competitive trials of horsemanship, bull-fighting, music, dancing, and gambling were some of the amusements of these people.

Most attractive of these sports which took place in the old plaza were the bear and bull fights. There was always a bull fight on September 16, the day of the independence of Mexico. A high fence was erected on the plaza and the best music was engaged for the occasion. Traveling toreadors came as actors do nowadays. They wore splendid attire, striped trousers, plumed hats, and flaming capes, which they cast into the face of the animals. Often a toreador killed three or four bulls in one afternoon. If a toreador met death in a bull-fight he was not allowed to have Mass said for his soul, as the church was strongly opposed to bull-fights. He could not enter the church dead, and could not be buried in holy ground. Bull-fighting was abolished by law in 1854.

The Spaniards had a great passion for gambling. They gambled on horse-races, cock-fights, and bull and bear-fights. Their principal game was three card monte, for which they would give up all money, horses, cattle, and even clothing from their backs. Many

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of these folk even sold or pledged their vast domains to obtain money for this passion. Small children even gambled buttons from their clothing. Many rich families were reduced to poverty through this vice.

The only church in jurisdiction for a long while was the mission at Santa Clara. It was built of adobe and the beams were redwood logs. Today the upper railing of the sanctuary at Santa Clara is one of those beams. The Indians told them of the juice of the cactus from which they might get colors to decorate the church.

The women rode to church in vehicles of two wheels, which were sections of logs, with holes bored through the center for the insertion of axles, which were held in place by hardwood pins on each side. The carts were driven by oxen. The men rode their horses on each side of the cart so the wild cattle wouldn't attack. Sometimes cattle came at them indroves. The ride took four hours and a half. The women wore silk dresses and shawls from China. Embroidery on the shawls was an inch thick. They took a carpet along with them, as they had to sit on the floor.

These were a generous class of people and very hospitable. Every passerby was welcome not only to food and rest for the night, but to a fresh horse from the corral to continue their journey. When strangers came they gave great balls to which everyone was invited. During the ball guests stayed for several days with no sleep during the festivity. Occasionally they napped during the days of merriment. When the women danced the men threw their hats on the heads of the ladies and scattered gold at their feet. For the gentlemen who did not care to dance there was a ramada built for smoking, conversation,

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and cards. These folk danced very slowly and were very graceful in the fandango. Young ladies went to the dance with their mother or duennas.

Love was as natural as the sunshine. When a youth was successful he told his father of his plans and then the father of the young lady. If the father consented the trousseau was immediately prepared. This consisted of dresses and household furnishings. Her marriage portion was cattle, horses, and lands. Sometimes six women worked for a week preparing food for the wedding festivities, which often lasted weeks. The bride and groom came from the church riding side by side. Two young gentlemen rode on each side of the couple, holding over the heads of the bride and groom a generous arch of silks and flowers.

At the close of their gay times these people continued with their work until another festivity came around.

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